

WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY

Higher Degree Research
CONFIRMATION OF CANDIDATURE
GUIDE

CONFIRMATION OF CANDIDATURE GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

This guide has been developed by Graduate Research Services to support doctoral and MPhil candidates and their supervisors in understanding the University's requirements and processes for Confirmation of Candidature (CoC). The introduction outlines the principles and expectations that underpin the CoC process, while the remainder of the guide explains what candidates can expect and how to prepare for the milestone.

Expectations for CoC may vary across research disciplines. Schools, Faculties, and Institutes may have different approaches to elements such as the framing of research questions, the development of methodology, and the presentation of supporting evidence. Principal supervisors, in collaboration with the supervisory panel and the candidate, are responsible for ensuring that the approach and content align with these disciplinary expectations.

Regardless of disciplinary expectations, the CoC should be appropriately scoped to its purpose as a milestone. *Candidates are not expected to produce a document exceeding 10,000 words or to generate findings beyond those required to justify and contextualise the proposed research project.* Although material developed during the CoC process may later contribute to the thesis or future publications, the CoC is not intended to function as a mini-thesis, an early thesis draft, or a publication-ready manuscript.

The emphasis of the CoC must be on determining whether the candidate is appropriately prepared and equipped to complete the proposed program of research within the timeframe available for the degree, considering their mode of study and relevant personal circumstances. Requiring work that is excessive in scope, volume or complexity may unnecessarily delay progression, divert effort from the conduct of the research itself, and adversely affect a candidate's ability to complete their degree within the expected timeframe.

Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that CoC expectations are aligned with disciplinary and degree standards while remaining achievable, proportionate, and consistent across candidates. Where there is uncertainty regarding appropriate expectations, supervisors may consult experienced supervisors in their discipline but should seek advice from the HDR Director as the authority for expectations within the School or Institute.

Candidates who are concerned that CoC expectations are disproportionate to the purpose of the milestone are encouraged to discuss these concerns with their supervisory panel, HDR Director, or Associate Dean HDR (Faculty).

WHAT IS THE CONFIRMATION OF CANDIDATURE?

The Confirmation of Candidature (CoC) is a major early milestone in your higher degree research (HDR) program. It is a formal review of your research project, your progress to date, and your plan for completion. The process includes a written submission, a presentation, and a discussion with an academic advisory panel.

The CoC occurs within the first six months of full-time candidature (or the first year of part-time candidature) for both doctoral and MPhil degrees.

PURPOSE OF THE COC

In a successful CoC you demonstrate to the panel that:

- your research questions, aims, or objectives are well defined.
- your proposed methods and approach are appropriate to address your research questions, aims, or objectives.
- you have identified the skills required to conduct your research and have a plan to develop them where needed.
- your project has academic merit and the potential to make a meaningful contribution to knowledge or practice.
- your project is financially feasible, appropriately scoped, and achievable with the resources you have identified.
- you have prepared for any required ethics or other approvals and understand your responsibilities under the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research.
- you have identified relevant considerations for Indigenous research, research data management and foreign interference, and planned accordingly.
- you have made satisfactory progress and are prepared to continue with the research.
- you have a realistic plan for completion within the remaining candidature period.

The CoC is your opportunity to receive constructive feedback from experienced researchers that can help you:

- refine your research direction and methodology.
- modify the scope of your research to meet disciplinary expectations and remain achievable within available time and resources.
- identify project risks and challenges and develop appropriate mitigation strategies.
- identify additional development needs and plan activities to support your ongoing progression.
- strengthen planning for the next stages of your research project, including ethics approval where required.

WHAT THE COC IS NOT

The CoC is not intended to assess whether you have completed a substantial portion of your thesis or generated publication-ready findings. You are not expected to produce a journal article, thesis chapter, or extensive body of completed research.

KEY REQUIREMENTS OF THE COC

While specific requirements may vary across disciplines, every CoC must include the following components.

Prerequisite Milestone

You must complete your Candidature Plan before undertaking the CoC.

Written Component

You'll submit one paginated CoC document, with a maximum of 10,000 words, for review prior to the presentation. The document should include:

- research aims, questions, or objectives.
- the context and significance of the research.
- the proposed methodology and rationale, including relevant ethical considerations and, where required, how these will be addressed in your ethics application.
- a timeline showing planned research activities through to thesis submission.
- any anticipated resourcing requirements such as equipment, software, data access, specialised facilities, or training.
- an itemised budget and anticipated funding sources such as Candidature Support Funds (CSF), grant or project funding from your supervisor (if available), or external funding opportunities.
- the anticipated thesis structure and publication plans.
- references to relevant scholarly and other credible sources.

Additional material may be included where appropriate, such as a table of contents, lists of figures or tables, appendices, or examples of work completed to date.

You must also provide your latest research data management plan (RDMP) as a separate document. Your supervisor will attach this to the CoC form submission in ResearchMaster.

Presentation Component

You must present the key aspects of your proposed research project and completion plan to an academic advisory panel. You should be prepared to respond to questions from the audience and engage in a discussion with the panel about your research and the feedback provided.

CANDIDATE RESPONSIBILITIES

You are expected to:

- prepare and submit your CoC document to your supervisor by the deadline advised by your School or Institute, allowing sufficient time for panel review.
- review your research data management and ethics planning to reflect any changes since your Candidature Plan.
- work closely with your supervisory panel to ensure readiness for the milestone.
- prepare and deliver the CoC presentation.
- participate constructively in discussion and feedback.
- complete any revisions or follow-up actions arising from the CoC.
- provide information or assistance with administrative arrangements if requested by your supervisor or HDR Director.

PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES

Your principal supervisor is responsible for:

- providing discipline-specific guidance regarding CoC expectations and requirements.
- supporting your preparation for the written and presentation components.
- working with the HDR Director to establish an appropriate academic advisory panel.
- coordinating arrangements for the CoC, including meeting details and distribution of documentation to the panel.
- recording all key decisions and required actions at the CoC, including identified project and candidature risks and mitigation strategies.
- submitting the required documentation in ResearchMaster following the CoC.

WHAT HAPPENS AT THE COC?

The CoC generally includes a candidate presentation followed by an advisory panel discussion. Your School or Institute will advise on the format and timing of each component.

1. Candidate Presentation

You will present your proposed research project and explain how you intend to complete it. The presentation should broadly align with your written CoC document and must clearly demonstrate your understanding of the project and its proposed methods.

The exact format of the presentation is determined by your School or Institute. The presentation session may be open to a broader audience of fellow candidates, staff, and invited guests, and could include the opportunity for audience questions.

2. Advisory Panel Discussion

The academic advisory panel is chaired by the HDR Director or another suitably trained member of the Professoriate. The panel typically includes your supervisory panel, plus at least one academic staff member who is independent of the supervisory team, and additional subject experts where relevant, including industry representatives or external collaborators.

Following the presentation, the academic advisory panel will discuss your project with you in a closed session, focusing on:

- the clarity and significance of the research
- methodological decisions
- project feasibility and risk mitigation
- resource requirements
- progress to date and plans for completion.

The panel's role is to provide constructive academic feedback and to determine whether the project is viable and appropriately planned for successful completion.

POSSIBLE OUTCOMES

Following review by the panel and HDR Director (or equivalent), one of the following outcomes will be recommended:

- **Pass** – Congratulations! You have demonstrated that you have met all the requirements for your candidature to be confirmed and are ready to continue with your research.
- **Revisions Required** – Further work is required before candidature can be confirmed. Revisions will be limited to substantive matters that affect the research or your readiness to proceed, rather than minor editorial or grammatical issues.
- **Downgrade** – A recommendation is made to transfer to an alternative degree.
- **Fail** – Your candidature is placed 'At Risk' and you are required to complete a second attempt at CoC within three months (full-time) or six months (part-time). Failure to successfully complete a CoC on the second attempt will result in termination.

You will receive formal written feedback regardless of the outcome.

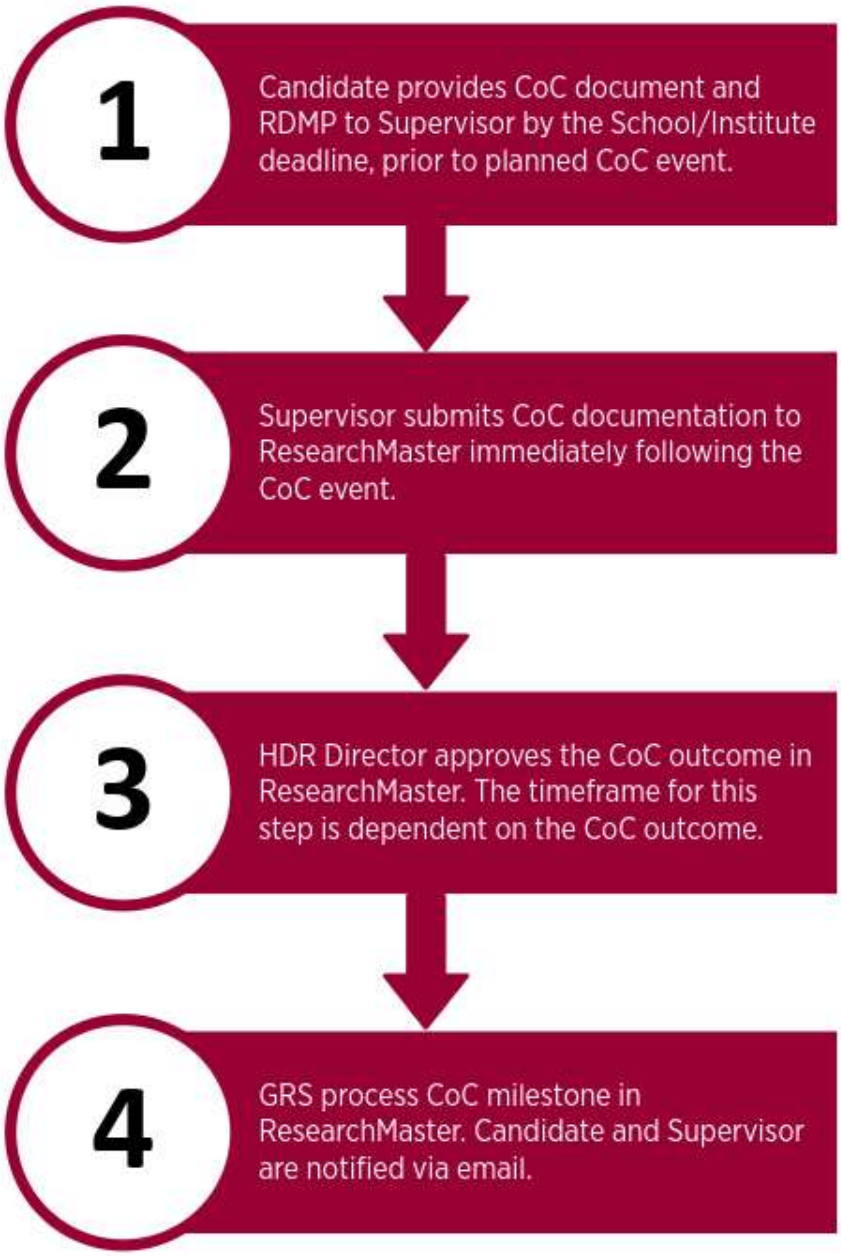
FURTHER QUESTIONS

If you have questions about the CoC process or expectations, contact:

- your principal supervisor (first point of contact)
- your HDR Director
- Associate Dean HDR (Faculty)

For procedural concerns, submit an enquiry to Graduate Research Services via WesternNow.

COC PROCESS FLOWCHART



HIGHER DEGREE BY RESEARCH POLICY AND ASSOCIATED PROCEDURES

The Higher Degree by Research Policy establishes the principles for the governance and conduct of HDR degrees and candidature at Western Sydney University.

When preparing for the CoC, the following associated HDR Procedures are particularly relevant:

- Higher Degree by Research Procedures - Progress
- Higher Degree by Research Procedures - Resources

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APPENDIX 1: DOCTORAL LEARNING OUTCOMES AND MILESTONE PROGRESSION

This framework shows how the knowledge, skills and capabilities expected of doctoral graduates develop progressively throughout candidature.

How to read this table: The left column lists the Program Learning Outcome expected on completion of the doctoral degree. The remaining columns show how candidates progressively develop and demonstrate the relevant capability at each milestone: Candidature Plan, Confirmation of Candidature, and Examination. The milestone statements are indicative and are not intended as a checklist of mandatory requirements.

- In your **Candidature Plan**, you identify what you intend to do.
- At **CoC**, you demonstrate that it is feasible and that you are prepared to do it.
- At **Examination**, you demonstrate what you have done and contributed.
- As a **doctoral graduate**, you are an independent, adaptable and responsible researcher, equipped to contribute across a range of roles and sectors.

Developing these capabilities is a shared responsibility. Your supervisory panel has primary responsibility for guiding your development, supported by your School or Institute and broader University learning and development opportunities. You also play a central role by identifying your development needs and actively seeking the support, resources and opportunities you need throughout candidature.

Doctoral Program Learning Outcomes	Capability Demonstrated at Each Candidature Milestone		
	Candidature Plan	Confirmation of Candidature	Examination
Demonstrate a systematic and critical understanding of a substantial body of knowledge at the forefront of their discipline or field of professional practice.	Identify key literature, theories and debates relevant to the proposed research.	Critically review the literature to justify the research questions and approach.	Explain how the research findings extend, challenge or refine knowledge in the field.
Identify, formulate, and investigate significant research questions that address complex theoretical, practical, or societal challenges.	Define the research problem and identify preliminary research questions, aims or objectives.	Present well-developed and significant research questions, aims or objectives that can be addressed within the project's scope and timeframe.	Demonstrate how the completed research has addressed the research questions, aims or objectives.
Design and conduct original and independent research using appropriate and rigorous research methodologies and applying expert technical and creative skills.	Identify methods that would be appropriate to address the research problem.	Outline and justify appropriate research design, including the proposed methods, data sources and analytical approach.	Demonstrate how appropriate methodologies were applied to complete an original and independent research project.
Generate and interpret new knowledge through research that makes an original and significant contribution to the discipline, profession, or field of practice.	Identify what the proposed research may contribute to knowledge or practice.	Explain how the proposed research may make an original contribution.	Clearly identify and substantiate the original and significant contribution made by the research.

Doctoral Program Learning Outcomes	Capability Demonstrated at Each Candidature Milestone		
	Candidature Plan	Confirmation of Candidature	Examination
Evaluate, critique, synthesise and apply evidence from diverse sources to advance scholarly understanding and inform decision making.	Review and synthesise relevant literature and evidence to identify key themes and areas for further investigation.	Critically evaluate existing knowledge and position the proposed research within the field of enquiry.	Integrate and interpret evidence to support the conclusions of the thesis, how they advance scholarly understanding, and how they inform decision making.
Exercise expert judgement, intellectual independence and research leadership in the planning, conduct, and management of research activities.	Take ownership of initial research planning, including priorities, activities and foreseeable risks.	Demonstrate increasing independence by justifying research decisions and planning how identified risks and challenges will be addressed.	Demonstrate intellectual independence and expert judgement in conducting the research and defending key decisions.
Communicate complex research concepts, methodologies and findings effectively to specialist, professional, and non-specialist audiences through a range of formats.	Explain the purpose and proposed approach of the research clearly in planning documents and discussions.	Communicate the research rationale, design and significance clearly through the CoC document, presentation and panel discussion, including how the research will be communicated to various audiences during candidature.	Present a coherent, evidence-based argument in the written thesis. Communicate and defend the research effectively during the viva voce examination.

Doctoral Program Learning Outcomes	Capability Demonstrated at Each Candidature Milestone		
	Candidature Plan	Confirmation of Candidature	Examination
Exhibit ethical principles, professional standards and accountability in research practice, including respectful engagement with Indigenous Australian peoples and communities.	Identify the ethical, professional, cultural and governance requirements relevant to the proposed research.	Explain how relevant ethical obligations, approvals, risks and responsible research practices will be addressed.	Demonstrate how the research was conducted in accordance with relevant ethical, professional and disciplinary standards.
Demonstrate adaptability, reflective practice and lifelong learning capabilities necessary for ongoing professional and scholarly development.	Identify research, technical and professional development needs and plan appropriate training or support.	Reflect on progress and explain how feedback, new information or emerging challenges have informed the research plan and approach.	Reflect on how the research project and the candidate's own capabilities developed throughout candidature.
Contribute to the advancement of knowledge, innovation and/or professional practice within academic, industry, community, or policy contexts.	Identify who may benefit from the research and its potential academic, professional, industry, policy or community significance.	Explain how the research may contribute to knowledge, policy, professional practice or innovation and identify credible pathways for applying the findings.	Explain the contribution made by the completed research and its implications for the relevant field or context.